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PROGRAMME, THE ENVIRONMENT FUND AND ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER BUDGETARY MATTERS

Progress report on the International Coral Reef Initiative

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report discusses UNEP's activities in support of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) and the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN), further to Governing Council decision 19/15. At the global level, UNEP provides financial and technical support within the ICRI Coordination and Planning Committee and the GCRMN Management Group. At the regional level, UNEP is undertaking pilot activities within the framework of the regional seas programme. Funds are also being sought for an International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN).

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

Endorse UNEP's proposed collaborative activities with agencies and organizations both inside and outside the United Nations system, for protection and conservation of coral reefs;

Request the Executive Director to carry out an assessment of experience to date in the implementation of the ICRI programme for discussion at the twenty-first session of the Council;

Endorse enhanced cooperation with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme in support of the International Coral Reef Initiative.

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I. BACKGROUND

1. Launched in 1995, the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) calls on States to give special attention to marine ecosystems that exhibit high levels of biodiversity and productivity, particularly within the context of chapter 17 of Agenda 21. These ecosystems include coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves. As noted in the report Reefs at Risk, published jointly by UNEP, the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC), the International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management (ICLARM) and the World Resources Institute (WRI), it is estimated that 27 per cent of the world's coral reefs are at high risk, and 31 per cent are at medium risk, from human activities, particularly coastal development, overfishing and destructive fishing practices.

2. The ICRI strategy, as embodied in the 1995 "Call to action" and "Framework for action", outlines the human-induced threats to coral reefs. It also focuses on mobilizing actions against these threats in four principal areas - improved coastal management, capacity-building, research and monitoring, and reviews. ICRI workshops have been held in the six ICRI regions to define regional needs and strategies and identify pilot projects. UNEP's regional seas programme has been instrumental in facilitating the implementation of the International Coral Reef Initiative, particularly by providing an institutional and legal framework for its implementation at the regional level. The Government of the United States of America also provided additional funding to UNEP's regional seas programme in 1997 to strengthen regional ICRI activities.

3. The goal of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN), an activity under the ICRI umbrella, is to support monitoring efforts focused on coral reefs, and particularly efforts to enhance their management. The GCRMN also disseminates information on the plight of coral reefs. "ReefBase: a Global Database on Coral Reefs and Their Resources", the official GCRMN database, is housed at ICLARM, and contains information on more than 7,000 coral reefs.

II. ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY UNEP IN RESPONSE TO GOVERNING COUNCIL DECISION 19/15

4. In decision 19/15, the Governing Council called on UNEP "to continue to play an active and leading role in the development, implementation and coordination of regional activities under the International Coral Reef Initiative, including through participation in its Coordination and Planning Committee". Accordingly, UNEP has participated in the work of the Committee, inter alia in order to coordinate UNEP's input into the ICRI process. At meetings in Washington, D.C. (8 October 1997) and Singapore (2 and 3 June 1998), the Committee discussed the upcoming International Tropical Marine Ecosystems Management Symposium to be held in Townsville, Australia from 23 to 26 November 1998, at which the overall ICRI process will be reviewed. Meetings of the Committee are also to be held in conjunction with the Symposium.

5. The Council also called on UNEP "to continue to sponsor the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, paying particular attention to promoting the monitoring and assessment of reefs". In pursuance of this request, UNEP has financially supported the GCRMN Coordination Office. With the UNESCO

Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN), UNEP actively participates in the GCRMN Management Group. The World Bank also actively supports the GCRMN and the ICRI. UNEP has also initiated a review of the GCRMN process. UNEP participated in the planning of the GCRMN South Asia Regional Network meeting held in Sri Lanka (5 and 6 August 1998), and is involved in the preparation of a proposal for the establishment of a GCRMN regional node for the Eastern African mainland. In cooperation with IOC, a training workshop on the use of remote sensing in mapping of critical marine habitats was convened in November 1997. The Network is working closely with its regional nodes to develop proposals for funding to assist in their implementation, as well as for monitoring and training. Funding possibilities include the Global Environment Facility and other sources.

6. The report Reefs at Risk already mentioned was published jointly by UNEP, WCMC, ICLARM and WRI as a response to the Council's call on UNEP "to help build global awareness of the urgent need to conserve coral reef resources, for example through the 1997 International Year of the Reef campaign and the 1998 United Year of the Oceans". The 1997 International Year of the Reef was supported with the distribution of information material to the media. UNEP also supported the Zanzibar National Coral Reef Conference (December 1997), held as part of the International Year of the Reef. Further, UNEP supported establishment of an Internet Web page on the ICRI and coral-reef-related activities.

7. Lastly, Council decision 19/15 also called on UNEP "to help promote the establishment of regional programmes in each of the six International Coral Reef Initiative regions and one or more demonstration projects in each region". In response, UNEP supports ICRI pilot activities identified through the ICRI regional workshops. An example is UNEP support for the development of a regional rapid assessment methodology for coral reefs (including biophysical and socio-economic aspects) in the Eastern African region. The outcome of the International Tropical Marine Ecosystems Management Symposium will be utilized to develop an agenda for future ICRI actions. UNEP will support the preparation of regional reviews for discussion at the Symposium, and work to facilitate the participation of experts and officials from developing countries.

III. NEW OPPORTUNITIES

8. On 1 September 1998, UNEP sought funding from the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships for a proposal on coral reef management and monitoring, "The International Coral Reef Action Network". The outline proposal was approved in October 1998. If the Fund approves the final proposal, UNEP will be in a position to substantially enhance its input to the conservation and sustainable use of coral reefs on a global scale. Building on the framework of the regional strategies and priority actions identified by ICRI regional workshops, it is also anticipated that the UNEP regional seas programme will initiate priority protective actions in constituent countries, including the establishment of model marine protected areas and coral reef management areas and reef monitoring. These actions

will be supported through an integrated series of global activities aimed at increasing public awareness of the need for coral reef conservation efforts, as well as coral reef assessments, implemented in collaboration with other ICRI partners.

IV. UNEP'S CORAL-REEF-RELATED ACTIVITIES IN THE BIENNIUM 2000-2001

9. The ICRI Framework for Action has been endorsed by 80 Governments, as well as several international organizations and funding agencies. The setting of this agenda for action constituted a substantial first step towards the sustainable use of coral reefs. The list of priority actions is well balanced and has "global ownership".

10. UNEP will continue its work, begun through the ICRI regional workshops, and supported through its regional seas programme. If adequate resources are available, UNEP will also initiate the implementation of identified regional strategies, particularly as a means of continuing previously developed momentum. To this end, an assessment in all regions of experience to date (including successes and failures) in the implementation of the ICRI programme will be instrumental in the formulation of future ICRI activities.